

## THE TRIUMPH OF THE NOVEL: DICKENS, DOSTOEVSKY, FAULKNER.

By *Albert J. Guerard*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976. x, 365 pp. \$13.95.

Albert Guerard has written major studies of Conrad, Gide, and Hardy, and is one of the venerables of American criticism of fiction, as well as a novelist of some importance himself. He knows well the tradition of the novel, the technical innovations that have characterized the novel since Flaubert, and the psychological theories that have come to affect our understanding of fiction. There are many things that this ambitious work is not: it is not a systematic and chronological treatment of the corpus of each writer; it is not, also, an attempt to handle—whatever the order—all of the works of importance. Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, and Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* are picked out for special and detailed treatment. The work is not even a comparative study, since the treatment of each novelist, except for occasional common concerns, proceeds rather independently.

Guerard does not deny himself anything: concern with technique, with the inner dynamics of the work, with biography, audience response, sources, notebooks, and cultural background. The approach is eclectic in the best sense, a term he seems to enjoy. He is against the mimetic conception of the novel and is for a view of the novel as a medium for making impossibilities real, a conception that has less importance than he attributes to it. Although he is defensive about his psychological interests and expertise, he is often at his best in the handling of authorial obsessions and psycho-sexual taboos. His remarks about the "forbidden games" that each of the authors indulges in (Dostoevsky's pedophilia, Faulkner's misogyny, and Dickens's forbidden marriages) are fascinating, original, and very illuminating.

This is a good book, but I had difficulty finding the focus of the work. It is not necessarily a thesis that is lacking and surely not a dogma relentlessly propounded, but something that gives specific shape to the many excellent points made by the author and something that justifies bringing together these three literary giants. Guerard has a mind that shies away from special visions, points of view, and arguments; but arguments shade into coherences, shapes, and identities. Guerard comes at the reader from many directions and the directions keep changing. He immerses the works and personalities of the three writers in a generation of thinking and writing about fiction and does so in a very personal context. From all this emerges a rather unusual work. I found myself fascinated but also unsettled and at times irritated. If one can put aside the demands for a systematic argument and open oneself up to a lively mind playing across the tradition of the Western novel and bringing multiple perspectives to the works of these three important writers, the book will be fresh and new.

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## THE GENTLE BARBARIAN: THE LIFE AND WORK OF TURGENEV. By

*V. S. Pritchett*. New York: Random House, 1977. xii, 244 pp. + 8 pp. photographs. \$10.00.

Why is this book so disappointing? Factually there is much confusion, for example, the Tjutchevs—the poet and the estate manager—get mixed up. Additionally, except for the lengthy plot summaries, much is secondhand; Yarmolinsky, Magarshack, and Freeborn have been raided at will.

There is a symptomatic lack of scholarly apparatus: no footnotes and too few attributions; no index; dates are so rarely mentioned that even the reasonably informed reader loses track. The "Bibliography" is a wildly random grab bag: two recent editions of Chekhov's letters, Sand's *Consuelo*, and Anna Dostoevsky's *Remi-*

*niscences* are included, although each receives only passing or invisible reference. Meanwhile, Turgenev's own *Literary Reminiscences*, while often quoted, is not listed.

Introducing his study, Pritchett writes: "There has not yet been a definitive biography of Turgenev in any language." The implication that this volume will fill the gap is outrageous. Of course Freeborn's study has its deficiencies, but it is sound, scholarly, and insightful. And much fine work has been done in Soviet Turgenev scholarship. Pritchett's inability to distinguish between the good and the charming, and his dismissal of scholarship in a language he does not read, is shockingly condescending. Indeed, neither he nor his editor has taken the trouble even to standardize or correct transliteration—for example, "Acia," and many others. French sources are extensively used, but the author has not bothered to translate them, although his book is directed to a popular audience. Even the title exudes superficiality. Turgenev was submissive and "gentle" and generous; he could be cruelly malicious also, as in his treatment of the young Dostoevsky. "Barbarian" reveals only the provincialism of Turgenev's French literary friends. Pritchett substitutes the hoary, outworn Goncourt phrase for any real analysis of the true ambiguity.

Pritchett has written fine short fiction, and in this volume, scattered like spoonfuls of real whipped cream on a sea of Cool Whip, are some penetrating observations—especially about the stories and novellas. Turgenev's letters are well used and effectively quoted, although even here one must cavil a bit: the fiction is overbiographized.

In sum, a disappointing book. I greatly admire some of Pritchett's stories, his brief essay on Leskov, and most of all his autobiographical *A Cab at the Door*. But I do wonder if he would wish that, a hundred years hence, a talented writer—but non-reader of English—would undertake his "definitive" biography?

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SUR SOLJENITSYNE: ESSAIS. By *Georges Nivat*. Lausanne: Editions l'Age d'Homme, 1974. 208 pp.

DUKHOVNYE OSNOVY TVORCHESTVA SOLZHENITSYNA. By *T. Lopukhina-Rodzianko*. Frankfurt/Main: Possev Verlag, 1974. 180 pp. DM 12.80, paper.

Georges Nivat's *Sur Soljenitsyne* may well be the best book on Solzhenitsyn to have yet been published by a single author. Nivat brings a first-rate mind, formidable erudition, literary sensitivity, and experience as the translator of several of Solzhenitsyn's novels to this fine collection of essays on the 1970 Nobel Prize winner. The critical breakthroughs in the book are many, and Nivat often succeeds in articulating what other critics have at best groped toward but have been unable to formulate. One sentence by Nivat can be worth whole chapters (Dare I say entire books?) by less gifted commentators.

This is high praise, but Nivat is deserving of it. Several examples must suffice as "evidence": Nivat's discussion of Solzhenitsyn's narrative treatment of character and use of "polyphony"—subjects much raked over by critics—bristles with insights and serves to move Solzhenitsyn criticism several important steps forward. Equally stimulating is Nivat's skillful and detailed examination of Solzhenitsyn's use of irony. And there is Nivat's treatment of Solzhenitsyn the "portraitist" in which he notes perceptively that the novelist tends *at the same time* toward the "ponderousness of caricature" and the "mysterious profundity of the symbol." Nivat also discourses helpfully on Solzhenitsyn's use of literary models (such as the *byliny* in *August 1914*) and of various source materials (for example, the memoirs of Protoperbyter Shavel'skii, also utilized in *August 1914*). While Nivat's comments range over the whole corpus of Solzhenitsyn's writings, he is particularly incisive when treating *The Gulag Archipelago* and *August 1914*.